



Business Concept - Summer 2023

Problem

Naturally Occurring **Affordable Housing is decreasing** in Metro Denver each year as home-owners age without the ability or planning to ensure their properties maintain affordability upon succession. Investors are ready to out-compete on price if a home comes to market, convert the homes to high-market rentals and extract profits. The next generation of **homeowners and renters are shut out** from participating in the market and previously affordable homes are lost. Many **small-scale rental owners (1-10 units) want to make a difference**, but are outside the mainstream of efforts addressing affordability. They operate on much thinner margins than corporate owners and **lack the expertise** and skills required to make their rentals affordable for the long-term. [more on Background...](#)

Approach

Capitalize on their untapped passion and dedication and **train small-scale rental owners** to preserve or convert their rental properties to long-term affordability. Connect these owners to available **financial incentives**, a network of **allied pros** who will support their process, and a **renter-advisor network** to increase equitable practices and improve quality of rental experience. [more on Service Model...](#)

Vision

With the right training and support, small-scale rental owners can become an essential and powerful force to **preserve and increase the number of affordable homes** across Metro Denver. [more on Impact...](#)

Revenue

All levels of government, private foundations, and individual and business funders all have a stake in housing affordability. **New funding sources**, including Colorado's Prop 123 and the Federal IRA, are coming online at a fast pace. Sienna's unique approach will attract a combination of funding sources, and lead to eventual earned revenue. [more on Revenue...](#)

Next Steps

Sienna is **seeking initial funding** to enable a cohort of rental owners to participate in training. We are seeking advisors, funders, and other potential partners to see the idea take shape. [more on Next Steps...](#)

Learn More

Contact Adam Evans, Founder, at adam@siennahousing.com | 303-585-0286

Additional Info

[Values & Culture](#) | [Eye to the Future](#) | [Research & Resources](#) | [About the Founder](#)

Background

When my spouse and I considered renting out our 2-bedroom house on Pecos Street, I started looking at resources for rental owners for basic things like lease templates, maintenance schedules, and rent-payment options. A lot of what I found was overly complex and obviously written for investors with a much larger ambition than ours. And the advice articles all seemed to be written from an adversarial vantage point. The conventional wisdom for “new landlords” had a clear premise (you’re in it to make a lot of money, why else?) and a singular focus (you can only make money when you minimize your hassles):

- Only rent to the “best” tenants (resume, references) and only rent if “squeaky clean” (criminal background, rental history, credit history)
- Don’t consider subsidies (like Section 8) because you’ll only have headaches
- Make the lease so tight that you wouldn’t even sign it yourself
- Raise rent every year so your tenants are used to it
- Repair only what’s necessary and keep expenses minimal

Conversations with other small-scale rental owners uncovered some cautionary tales and similar difficulties finding resources. But somehow several of them stuck with it and those who did had a common motivation: they knew that housing should mean more than walls and a roof and a profit/loss statement. They were doing their best to live out their personal values and that included how they made decisions as rental owners. They aligned their income/investment goals with their values and still turned a profit, all while valuing people and treating their renters with dignity and understanding.

I spoke with our renters and others who rented their homes (houses, apartments, different walks of life) and one message was consistent: We’ve got to get the landlords on board! Small-scale rental owners will be more receptive to the cause of affordability because they’re closer to their renters and know more about their circumstances. They have a lot of power in the system and if we get them engaged, renters will have a better experience and people will really benefit.

All of the research and conversations (and three years of meaningful rental ownership) led us to some great questions: Can we rely on the big players (governments, lenders, developers) to provide all the solutions to our housing crisis? How could small-scale rentals preserve (and expand) affordability? Where are alternative rental owner/tenant structures grounded in mutuality and shared financial wellbeing? Is it even possible to be an “ethical landlord?” What about those great small-scale rental owners in our community? Would they share their experience or mentor others? Would other rental owners take a similar approach and make their properties affordable? If so, what holds them back?

The answers to these questions convinced us that Sienna Housing Collaborators is an idea needed at this moment.

Service Model

Sienna Housing Collaborators seeks to equip rental owners to preserve affordable housing through training, advising, supportive networks, financial incentives, and collaborating with renters.

Training (*Cohorts of 5-10, 8-12 sessions, over 6 months*)

- **Why** make a property affordable?
 - Developing an owner's **rental philosophy** (grounded in personal values, visible to renters, shared with partners...)
 - **History** of housing and our system (ownership models, forces that drive costs, discrimination...)
 - **Current challenges** for affordability (shrinking number of affordable homes, market pressures, large investor infusion...)
 - Understanding **tenant obstacles** (competition for housing, mixed rental history, low credit, cash-availability, multi-gen families, inconsistent services, disabilities, personal history...)
- **How** to make a property affordable and successful?
 - **Legal** preparedness (risk prevention, balanced leases, interest-based mediation...)
 - Subsidizing and **incentives** options (public, private, self-funded...)
 - Supporting what **renters may need** (rent assistance, case management, social services...)
 - **Day-to-day** decisions (person-side, property-side, do-it-yourself vs. management company...)
 - Handling the **headaches** (nonpayment, late payment, damage, complaints...)
 - **Long-term affordability** (tenant equity sharing, deed protections, estate-planning...)

Advising (*1x1 Consulting*)

- **Owner readiness** assessment (financial setup & goals, skills assessment, contractor network, property needs...)
- Putting owners' **values** to work (adding action to concepts, identifying conflicts, grace for growth...)
- Rental **ownership plan** (grounded in values, affordability structures, financial goals adjustment, reality check...)
- Connections to **experts** (based on owners' needs, legal, financial, property management...)
- Renter **relationship coaching** (listing, screening, move-in, relationship-building, communication plan...)
- **Practical resources** for complicating issues that tenants face (e.g. mental health, surviving violence, racism/classism...)

Supportive Networks

- Training with **other rental-owners** (encouragement, reflection, shared experience, sharing resources...)
- **Ongoing quarterly** open house or happy hour, highlighting something unique (speaker, musician, artist, experience...)
- **Mentorship** from experienced rental owners
- Introducing **service providers** (mental health, workforce development, skilled trade educators...)
- Introducing **allied professionals** (legal, financial, property maintenance, management...)
- Introducing affordable housing **advocates and champions** (coordination of efforts, inspiration to do more...)

Financial Incentives

- **Sienna-direct incentives** (for participants only)
 - Monthly **cash-flow subsidy** to rental owners for keeping rent below market (time-limited? tied to milestones or market analysis?)
 - **Payment for long-term commitments** like deed-restrictions or implementing tenant equity plan
- **Other sources** (understanding what's out there, system processes, saving wasted steps)
 - **Federal and state** voucher programs (Housing Choice Voucher Program, Colorado Transitions, Veterans Affairs...)
 - **Smaller programs** (local, provider-based, site-based, temporary...)
- **Savings & efficiency** (connections made or skills gained save real money for rental owners)
 - **Discounts** from contractors (saving dollars on repairs and maintenance)
 - **Access** to allied professionals with affordability background (saving dollars on ill-advised decisions and planning)

Collaborating with Renters

- Renter **advisory group**
 - **Cross-section** of renters (independent, human service-connected, newer and experienced,
 - **Share** lived experience and viewpoints with rental owners
 - **Paid** for participation
- Renter **panel discussions**
 - **Q&A** with training program participants
 - **Widen perspectives** of rental owners, increase awareness

Impact

Sienna's service model promises to retain and increase Metro Denver's housing affordability by addressing the barriers facing owners and the challenges impacting tenants.

Problems in Housing Affordability	Sienna Solution
Large investors are increasing their purchases of rental properties, increasing the risk of currently affordable housing being lost .	Sienna will help properties retain affordability which otherwise might be lost to the investor market.
Current rental owner coaching focuses primarily on maximizing income over affordability , missing the community's needs entirely.	Sienna will increase the number of affordable properties owned by small-scale rental owners.
Most rental properties have no structure to sustain their affordability.	Sienna-connected properties will "bake-in" affordability mechanisms to retain affordability for 10-20 years or more .
No formal network exists in Metro Denver to engage small-scale rental owners in the affordability crisis.	Sienna will enable rental owners to become a powerful network of advocates for housing affordability.

Problems for Rental Owners	Sienna Solution
Rentals owners are aware homelessness and housing affordability are huge issues, but they often feel stuck and unable to help .	Sienna will grow owners' capacity to make a difference and provide them the skills to make greater use of their influence and resources.
Small-scale rental owners are more likely to be middle-income earners and feel the pressure of cash-flow and investment expectations .	By exposing them to new incentives and rental support programs, Sienna will help rental owners see how they can align their financial goals with their values to benefit their community.
Past tensions with tenant issues cost rental owners time, money, and energy. For some,	Sienna will help rental owners achieve peace of mind with expanded skills and a resource

<p>challenges renters face seem too difficult to handle, causing many to “play it safe.”</p>	<p>network to be better prepared to handle issues as they arise.</p>
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<p>Problems for Renters</p>	<p>Sienna Solution</p>
<p>Renters often spend 40-50% of their monthly income on housing, lessening their ability to handle a financial hit, increasing their risk of eviction.</p>	<p>Renters who live in a Sienna home will experience less displacement and evictions because of lower rent and knowledgeable and compassionate rental owners.</p>
<p>Traditional renters have no savings vehicle through their home (unlike rental owners).</p>	<p>Renters will advance their own financial goals while they live in a Sienna home, with some properties utilizing renter-equity models.</p>

Revenue

The landscape of funding for affordable housing is changing rapidly, with new sources creating an amazing opportunity to get Sienna started. Funders across several sectors with at least one experienced major partner will help Sienna grow from a new idea into a community strength. A full funding strategy will take shape depending on the source and timing of initial funding (see [Next Steps](#)).

Start-Up Phase (\$50,000 → \$100,000 annually)

- Foundation & Public
 - **Established housing funders** and leaders like: CHFA, Colorado Homeownership Coalition, Colorado Mortgage Lenders Assoc, Enterprise Community
 - **New initiative funders** like: CHAI Fund, Colorado Gives Foundation, Colorado Health Foundation
- Private
 - **Individual** investors/donors with **lead investor** to spark further funding
 - **Industry prospects** like: real estate professionals, real estate investors, housing developers
 - **Values-connected prospects** like: faith communities, B-corps, values-based businesses

Growth Phase (\$200,000 → \$500,000 annually)

- Foundation & Public
 - Retain and grow base funding, expand to new funders
- Government
 - **State & Federal:** CO Division of Housing, HUD, existing & Prop 123
 - **Local:** Metro housing authorities, Denver Dept of Housing Stability
- Private
 - Retain and grow base

Long-Term (\$500,000 → annually)

- Traditional Fundraising
 - Program **participants** (rental owners, renter “graduates”)
 - Program **partners** (allied professionals, guest experts)
 - **Community**-wide exposure (public campaign, business-connected publicity)
- Earned Income (see [Eye to the Future](#))
 - **Train others** to expand to other communities (training certifications, model licensing)
 - Participation **fees** (rental owners, referring organizations)
 - **New services** like rental relationship management

Next Steps

Starting a new venture will take tenacity and patience. What follows are concrete steps to move the vision forward:

A. Build advisor/mentor relationships

- Affordable housing experts and advocates - IN PROGRESS
- Rental ownership - IN PROGRESS
- Rental management - NEED CONNECTIONS
- Organizational culture - IN PROGRESS

B. Seek expert advice

- Housing professionals & advocates - IN PROGRESS, NEED CONNECTIONS
- Housing funders - IN PROGRESS, NEED CONNECTIONS
- Start-up or NPO incubators - IN PROGRESS, NEED CONNECTIONS
- Preservation Next Academy (training cohort with Enterprise) - IN PROGRESS

C. Address key questions

- Who is **most interested and invested** in helping Sienna get started?
- Where could **lead funding** originate to get Sienna into action?
- Where do Sienna's proposed services address an **unmet need** and do they **duplicate** other efforts?
- What **organizational structure** would best serve Sienna? (e.g new NPO, alternative corp, adoption by existing entity)
- What **funding architecture** is most viable? (e.g. private, public, charitable, earned income, combination)
- What **affordability standards** (e.g. % AMI, market comparison) would define the core of Sienna's focus?

Values & Culture

Sienna's commitment to growing hearts for renters is centered in the concept of mutuality, that benefit for one does not imply the loss for another. Mutuality shows up in the content of our work and how we bring it to life.

Shared Values

Starting with these values, Sienna helps participants understand and grow their personal values, drawing direct connections to their decisions as rental owners and partners with their renters:

- **All people** deserve safe and stable housing
- Preserving long-term affordability in rental housing is **worth the work**
- **Rental owners can** have an tangible positive impact in the community
- I can only **start with what I have** and who I know
- **Personal growth** can lead to change in the big systems

Internal Culture

At Sienna, how we do what we do is as important as what we do. We grow in understanding and ability by practicing and growing what we want to see grow in our work. Knowing that values will and must evolve as teams are built and the work takes shape, here are some initial values that guide us:

- **Big Change:** We believe big change is possible (take thoughtful risks, create something new...)
- **Flexibility:** We are flexible in how we reach our goals (hold solutions loosely, expect bumps in the road, be ready to adjust...)
- **Clarity:** We strive for clarity (ask dumb questions, check assumptions, elevate tensions, over-communicate...)
- **Accountability:** We are accountable to each other and the community (understand our work & others' work, evaluate from the jump, acknowledge shortcomings, grow through failures...)
- **Identity:** We know that identity matters (acknowledge our social location, seek unheard and undervalued voices...)
- **Transformation:** We understand that personal transformation is vital (practice humility, lean into discomfort, extend grace to self & others...)
- **Joy:** Our work brings joy and we enjoy each other (celebrate, recognize great work, rest...)

Eye to the Future

If Sienna's vision and core program elements become viable, doors may open for other ideas to take hold as well. Below are a few examples of where Sienna could move in the future:

Tenant-driven business growth

- Employment opportunities with Sienna
- Facilitation of panels and advisory groups with incentives

Expanded tenant services

- Available throughout their stay in a Sienna home
- Individual case management, resource linking, career & life coaching
- Assistance with moving on (next rental) & moving up (home ownership)
- Financial incentives for participating in program

Property development consultation

- Advise small-scale developers and investors on steps to achieve affordability with their projects (e.g. keeping prior home as rental when purchasing next home, building an ADU's, developing adjacent land)

Property acquisition & management

- Purchase historically affordable properties at risk of losing their affordability
- Establish affordability in deed, lease structures, equity sharing with tenants
- Manage properties going forward

Rental relationship management for owners

- Screening & placing tenants
- Assistance with subsidy compliance requirements
- Frequent check-ins to troubleshoot issues in advance with direct assistance and mediation for tougher issues
- Tenant replacement services at move out

Research & Resources

Researching a new concept brought Sienna into contact with some forward-thinkers asking important questions and amazing groups working on solutions:

Articles, Writings, Videos

- [Am I a Greedy Landlord?](#) (a small-scale rental owner struggles with how to make a difference)
- [The Cost of Living is Top of Mind for Coloradans](#) (key findings from Colorado Health Foundation's Pulse data analysis)
- [Ensuring Safe and Affordable Housing Stock Starts with Understanding Who Owns Rental Units](#) (highlighting the importance of small-scale ownership as larger investors take on a bigger share of the rental market in America)
- [HC Community Covenant](#) (a faith community's guide to developing relational health, Adam is a long-time member and lay-leader in this community)
- [Is Being a Landlord Worth It?](#) (simple, investment-focused advice for people considering small-scale rental ownership)
- [Owners and Renters of 6.2 Million Units in Small Buildings Are Particularly Vulnerable](#) (characteristics of small-scale owners and renters that makes them worth supporting)

Organizations

- [CHAI Fund](#) - Denver, CO (innovative social enterprise funder bringing real dollars to middle income housing development)
- [Enterprise Community](#) - Nationwide (org that builds, finances, trains, advances policy, and creates regional networks to bring about greater housing affordability)
- [Housing Collaborative](#) - Charlotte, NC (org with similar vision of Sienna and extensive service model, larger 30 y/o organization which changed direction in 2022)
- [Mile High Ministries](#) - Denver, CO (faith-based org with a singular focus on housing affordability and creating supportive communities)
- [West Colfax Lampstand](#) - Denver, CO (independent org which started several small-scale supportive housing developments in Denver)

About the Founder

Adam considers Sienna a mid-career culmination of his years of work and an idea that brings together his passions for addressing unmet community needs through innovation and connecting with people.



- **Professionally**, Adam has worked as a therapist and non-profit executive. He served [Project PAVE](#), a youth violence prevention organization, for over 15 years.
 - As **Executive Director**, Adam helped grow PAVE's budget by almost 50% to \$1.2 million in 2022. Adam helped secure multi-year funding across sectors: the first 5-year, \$500k pledge from PAVE's largest individual donor; a new 3-year, \$150k grant from a national foundation, and a new 3-year, \$300k grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.
 - Adam advanced the organization's internal culture, establishing a comprehensive pay equity philosophy and a 32-hour work week.
 - As **Program Director**, Adam helped launch the Youth Community Educators Program, a youth employment program training youth to educate their peers on healthy relationships, and secured partnership with the Denver Broncos for the True Man program, a healthy masculinity program focused on youth football players.
- As a **volunteer**, Adam has participated actively on state-wide and local boards and advisory groups (including CDPHE, CDHS, Denver Public Schools, and Denver DA's Office) and face-to-face with organizations like Rocky Mountain Welcome, Trevista Elementary, and Street Fraternity.
 - Adam presently serves as Co-Chair of the Board of [Violence Free Colorado](#), a state-wide coalition of organizations committed to ending relationship abuse.
 - Adam helped start [Highlands Church](#), an inclusive faith community in Denver and served as its first Board Chair. Adam continues on the Co-Pastor Care Team and as a worship band member, playing bass guitar and saxophone.
- Adam has a Masters Degree in Counseling Psychology, training in **Interest-Based Mediation** and is a current participant in Enterprise Communities' **Preservation Next Colorado** training.
- **Avocationally**, Adam enjoys managing their rental property and connecting with their tenants. He usually has a couple home renovation or landscaping projects in progress and is an avid jogger and musician.
- Adam lives in SE Denver with his amazing and supportive **family**: Megan, his partner and spouse since 2003, his two incredible daughters Uma (10) and Anika (8), and his mother Linda.

Check out Adam on [LinkedIn](#).